

Story 1523 (1981 Tape 9)

Narrator: Ali Çiftçi, farmer;
in mid-60s by this
time

Location: Çıkırıkçı village,
Sarıkaya kaza,
Yozgat Province

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The Two Hızırs¹

The blessed Hızır was a messenger.² There were really two Hızırs, one of whom was İlyas,³ who was the Hızır of the seas, and Ermiya,⁴ who was the Hızır of the earth. They were cousins.

¹Once a water deity and fertility god--and still both those figures to most farmers in southern Turkey--Hızır is more widely known now as a granter of wishes, a last-minute rescuer from disaster, and a special messenger and agent of God. In these latter three functions he appears fairly frequently in Turkish folktales. Not mentioned by name in the Koran, a chapter of that work was later named after him. He is assumed to be the person instructing Moses in Chapter XVIII of the Koran, where he is referred to by God simply as "our servant."

²Being a messenger of the Deity was but one of several roles of Hızır.

³The narrator is confused. İlyas (Elijah) was a water god in ancient Hebrew culture as Hızır was in ancient Arab culture. They were so similar that they merged in the folk imagination. There is ample evidence for this doubling. One of the most obvious pieces of evidence is the fact that the day in Turkey sacred to Hızır is not called Hızır Day (May 6) but Hidrellez (Hızırilyas) Day.

⁴Is this a local name for Hızır or is it Ali Çiftçi's creation? The name does not appear in any Modern Turkish or Ottoman Turkish dictionary at the Archive. Nor is it listed in either the Encyclopaedia of Islam or the Turkish Encyclopaedia.

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Their fathers were brothers, one a hoca and the other a man. The hoca⁵ consulted his books and discovered that a new star was to be born at a certain time and in a certain place in the sky. If a husband and wife were making love at time that the new star appeared, they would have a boy, that boy would be a Hızır. He was reading this to himself, but he was reading it aloud, and he did not realize anyone else could hear what he was saying. But his sister-in-law overheard what he had said, and she reported this to her husband. "A star is going to be born tonight at a certain place in the sky. If we should be making love at time that that star appears, we would have a boy, and boy would be a Hızır. Let us not fall asleep tonight keep watch for the appearance of that star."

When the star appeared in the sky, both brothers were lying with their wives, and both women became pregnant. They both bore boys nine months later. The hoca's son was named İlyas, and the poor brother's son was named Ermiya.

⁵Today a hoca is a preacher and religious leader. In pre-Republican Turkey he was both preacher and teacher, for then education was in the hands of the clergy. Occasionally this dual function of Ottoman times lingers in the present, for students sometimes refer to a secular school teacher or professor as "My hoca."

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One day when the boys were eight years old, they came across a cow that staggered as she walked. İlyas, the son of the hoca, said, "This cow is apparently crippled."

Ermiya, the son of the poor brother, said, "No, I think that the cow staggers because the calf in its belly has a very heavy tail."

When they slaughtered the cow and cut open its belly, they found that Ermiya had been right. The calf did have a very heavy tail, and it was that weight that made it walk so clumsily. When the hoca heard about this incident, he said to İlyas, "My son, do not leave the side of Ermiya."

Several years later the two boys went in search of the Water of Life.⁶ At one place on their journey they were short distance apart. Ermiya was tired, and when he saw a fountain, he said to himself, "Let me eat something here before I continue my search." Then, after saying, "There is no god but God," he drank from the fountain. As he did so, a drop of water fell upon a dried fish in his food packet, a fish that had been caught seven years earlier. As soon as the drop of water struck the fish, it revived and jumped into the stream of water that flowed from the fountain. Ermiya exclaimed, "Oh, I have found the Water of Life!" and he

⁶The term used by the narrator is abuhayat.

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jumped into the stream. İlyas rejoined him at that moment, and he too entered into the stream. The Water of Life made both of them eternal. İlyas became the Hızır of the seas, and Ermiya became the Hızır of the land.